



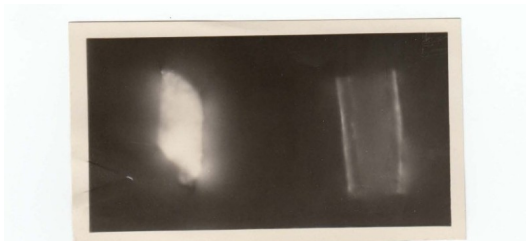
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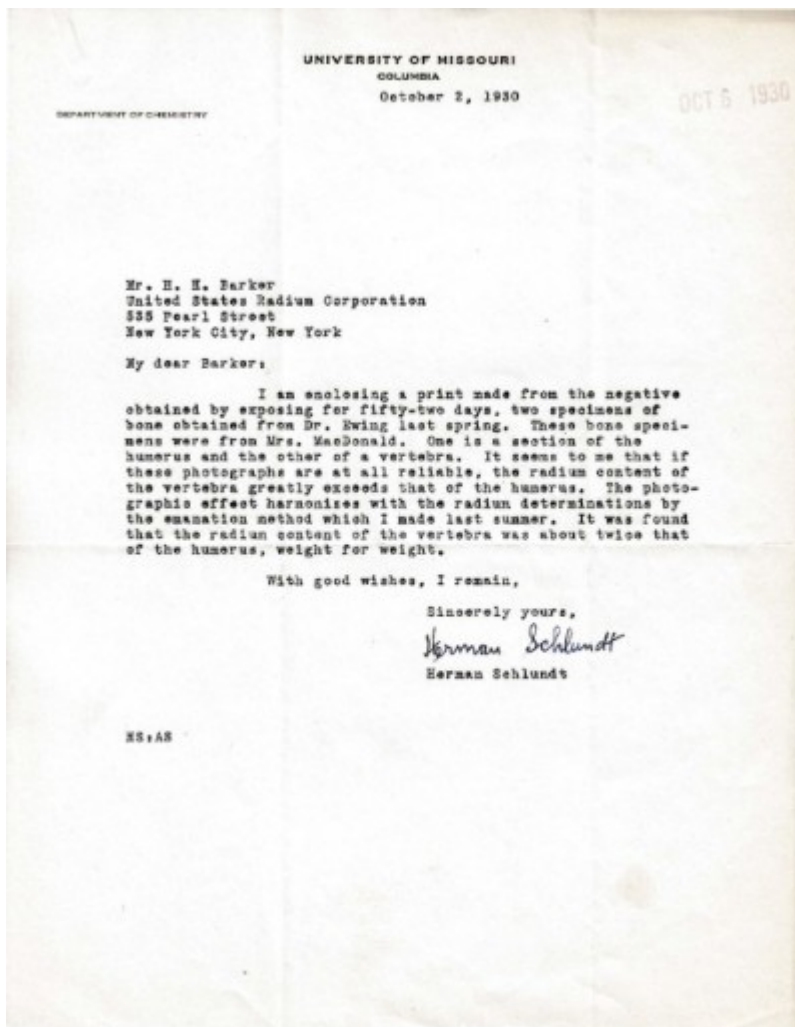
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## The Radium Girls

Early in 2016, the Electronic Records Division of the National Archives and Records Administration received an unusual collection of donated electronic records. The original paper records, found to be radioactive, were discovered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during cleanup operations at the Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania Safety Light Corporation Superfund site. These records document the perspective of the United States Radium Corporation (USRC) and its predecessor, the Radium Luminous Material Corporation (RLMC), on the story of the radium luminous paint dial painters, popularly known as the Radium Girls. These digitized records are now available in the National Archives Catalog as [Records Related to Radium Dial Painters, 1917-1949](#) (National Archives Identifier 40978844).



Bone Specimens, Mrs. Mc K. -  
Vertebra - Humerus  
~~Mrs. Mc~~  
Exposure - 52 days



*Letters Received to H.H. Barker, October 2, 1930 (National Archives Identifier [75725719](#))*

Following Marie Curie's discovery of the element radium in 1898, scientists and entrepreneurs sought to understand and exploit the element's properties. Many young women were employed in dial painting studios, applying paint containing radium to a number of products, including watches and instrument dials. For some time after its discovery radium was considered safe and was even advertised as a beneficial substance.

During the early 1920s, a growing number of scientists and physicians began to question the benefits of radium and, slowly, acknowledge its link with the debilitating illnesses afflicting dial painters. Complaints and lawsuits by former employees against the USRC began to proliferate in 1923.

**TO THE STOCKHOLDERS  
OF UNITED STATES RADIUM CORPORATION**

During March 1936 a final decree, in favor of the Corporation, was entered in the LaPorte case. This resulted from Judge Foreman's decision mentioned in our last year's report to you. Subsequent to this decree, all the other suits pending against the Corporation were discontinued, and by Fall of last year, the Corporation, for the first time since 1924, found itself free from litigation.

This release from contingent liability occasioned by pending litigation, afforded an opportunity to distribute to Preferred Shareholders a portion of the Corporation's capital assets not considered essential to the conduct of its business.

Preliminary to the offer of stock purchase made in January of this year, the Corporation's assets were adjusted to values considered conservative by your Directors. Good-will, etc., was reduced from \$200,000 to \$1.00, — idle plant was written down to an amount in line with what might reasonably be expected in case of sale, — and inventories were adjusted to present day market prices. All these are reflected in the attached Balance Sheet.

The purchase offer to Preferred Stockholders, mentioned above, has up to this writing resulted in the purchase by the Corporation of 2,495 shares of its Preferred Stock at an average price of \$62.96 per share. This capital reduction is not shown in the attached Balance Sheet as all purchases, with the exception of 100 shares, have been made since the beginning of 1937.

Sales for the year were about the same in volume as the previous year, but operating profits were less, largely on account of increased competition at reducing prices. Should this condition continue, it will be difficult to earn anything like a fair return on the capital invested in the business. Operations for the year resulted in a loss of \$555.65.

The Corporation's subsidiary, the Weksler Thermometer Corporation, enjoyed an increase in its manufacturing and sales volume of twenty-eight percent. This normally should show a satisfactory operating profit. However, sales and promotional expenses, considered necessary to the expansion of a new business, were relatively heavy, and consequently the net result was a profit of \$2,096.01.

The books of the Corporation have been audited by Messrs. Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co. of New York.

Very truly yours,

CLARENCE B. LEE,  
*President.*

*Report, December 31, 1936 (National Archives Identifier [75729459](#))*

The USRC never admitted any liability for the illnesses of the dial painters and settled the suits brought against it out of court. The most famous settlement went to Grace Fryer, Katherine Schaub, Edna Hussman, Albina Larice, and Quinta McDonald in June of 1928.

said Committee of Physicians, or a majority of them, shall at any time determine and report that the party of the second part is not, at the time of said report, under any disability due to radium poisoning or to the effects thereof, then no further payments of annuity provided for by paragraph 1 of this agreement shall be made by the party of the first part to the party of the second part.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the party of the first part has caused its corporate seal to be hereto affixed and this agreement to be signed by its President and attested by its Secretary and the party of the second part has hereunto set her hand and seal the day and year first above written.

UNITED STATES RADIUM CORPORATION

By (signed) C.B. Lee  
President.

ATTEST:

(signed) Thomas R. Strahan  
Secretary

Signed, Sealed and Delivered  
in the presence of

Grace Fryer

(signed) Raymond H. Berry

*Settlement Agreement, June 8, 1928 (National Archives Identifier [75722886](#))*

In this case, which received substantial attention in the press and from the New Jersey Consumer's League, the dial painters received \$10,000 (some sources state the amount was as high as \$15,000), a \$600 annuity while they lived, and the coverage of their medical expenses, subject to the approval of a committee of three doctors.

While a few dial painters received substantial settlements, generally such suits and claims resulted in much smaller compensations. Three of the earliest suits against the USRC were brought by Marguerite Carlough, the family of her sister Sarah Maillefer, and the family of Hazel Kuser. Carlough's heirs received \$9,000. The family of Hazel Kuser received \$1,000 and Sarah Maillefer's survivors received \$3,000, each estate signing releases protecting the company from further litigation.



3163

**To all to whom these Presents  
Shall come or may concern,**

**GREETING:**

*KNOW YE; THAT* I, THEODORE C. KUSER, Individually and as Administrator of the Estate of Hazel Kuser, deceased, of the Town of West Orange, in the County of Essex and State of New Jersey,

*for and in consideration of the sum of*

ONE THOUSAND (\$1,000.00) DOLLARS,

*lawful money of the United States of America, to me in hand paid by* UNITED STATES RADIUM CORPORATION and ARTHUR ROEDER,

*have remised, released and forever discharged, and by these presents do, for myself, and successors,*  
*my heirs, executors, and administrators, remise, release and forever discharge the said* UNITED STATES RADIUM CORPORATION and the said ARTHUR ROEDER, *their successors, heirs, executors and administrators, of and from all and all manner of action and actions, cause and causes of action, suits, debts, dues, sums of money, accounts, reckonings, bonds, bills, specialties, covenants, contracts, controversies, agreements, promises, variances, trespasses, damages, judgments, executions, claims and demands whatsoever, in law or in equity, which against the said UNITED STATES RADIUM CORPORATION and/or the said ARTHUR ROEDER*  
~~*exercised, now or hereafter, I, either Individually or as Administrator of the Estate of the said Hazel Kuser, deceased, ever had, now have, or*~~  
*which my heirs, executors or administrators, hereafter can, shall, or may have, for, upon or by reason of any matter, cause or thing whatsoever, from the beginning of the world to the day of the date of these presents.; and particularly but not by way of limitation of and from any and all claims arising out of or resulting from the injuries to or the death of the said Hazel Kuser, resulting from any accident, injury, disease or other condition received, incurred, or sustained by the said Hazel Kuser at the plant of or while engaged in the employment of the said United States Radium Corporation.*

General Release to Arthur Roeder [A. Roeder], April 29, 1926 (National Archives Identifier [75720833](#))

The majority of dial painters received no compensation from the company. In 1980, U.S. Radium was substantially reorganized and ultimately dissolved into new corporations. Its former radium processing facilities, which included the dial painting studio of Orange, New Jersey, where Grace Fryer and her compatriots worked, became a Superfund cleanup site. The EPA completed the cleanup in Orange during 2006, and cleanup work at the Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania facility, which is still ongoing, is where the collection was discovered. The radioactive paper records have been disposed of accordingly, but thanks to the Safety Light Corporation's donation of the documents, and the EPA's scanning of them, the history has been preserved and made available in the National Archives Catalog

as [Records Related to Radium Dial Painters, 1917-1949](#) (National Archives Identifier 40978844).

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*This post was excerpted from a blog post on [The Text Message](#) by Zachary Dabbs, processing archivist at the National Archives in College Park. Read Zachary's [full post](#) to learn more about these records.*

Do you find these records fascinating? Help us transcribe them!

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*Photograph of Suffrage Parade, 1913 (National Archives Identifier [593561](#))*

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